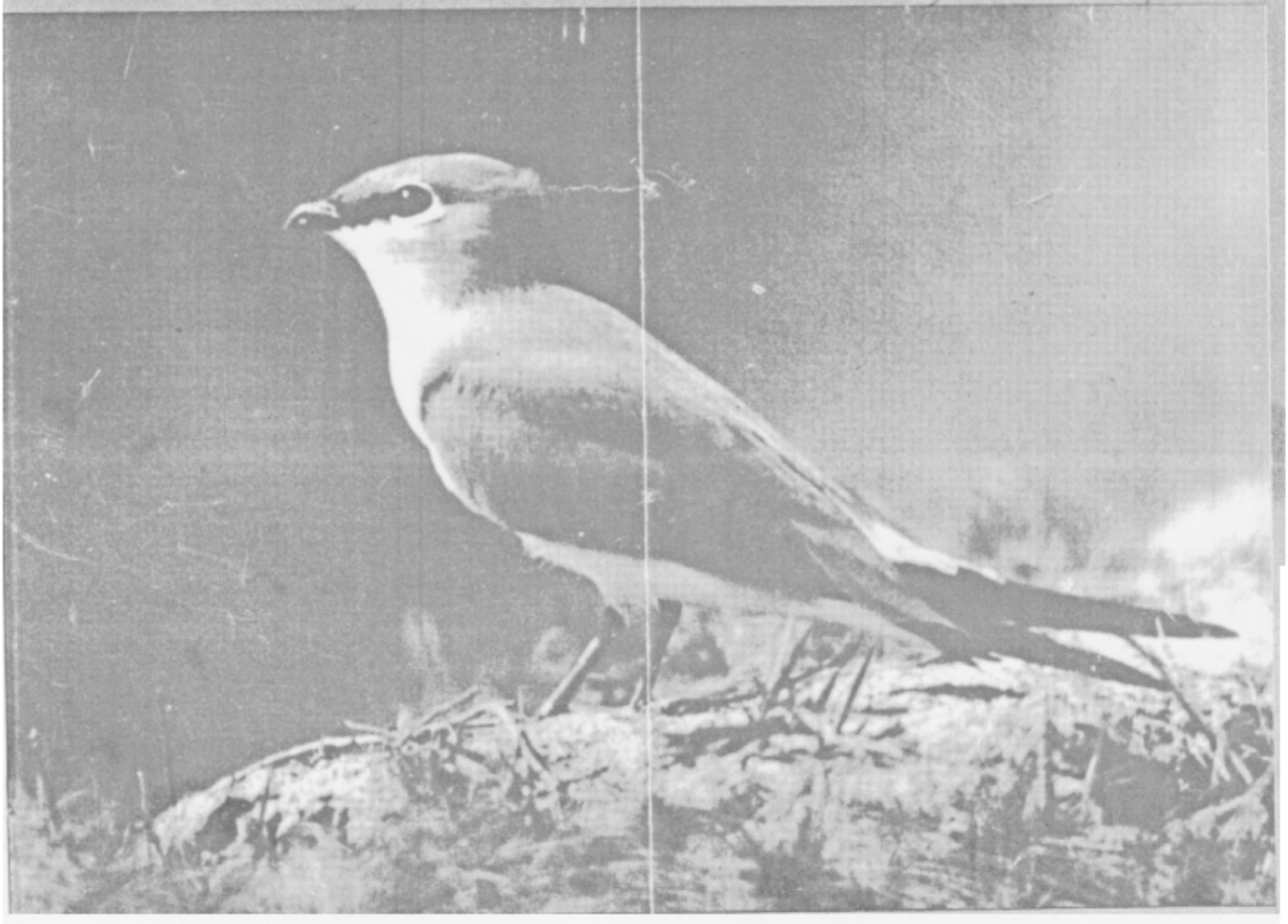
Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL. XXVIII No. 11 & 12 Nov – Dec. 1988



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EDITORIAL

aluable Suggestions

Readers often send useful suggestions for improving the uality of the Newsletter, which I regret, I do not always nplement. A case in point is Ms. Manuele's letter published the Correspondence section. Among other things she sks "Are there any specific areas which are not yet known". here are of course many ordinary things which we do not now. We do not even know whether both parents in the ase of a common bird like the Brahminy Kite incubate the ggs. Salim Ali says "both sexes share in domestic duties" hough some others question wheher both birds incubate he eggs. The area of study which is very worthwhile for rnithology in general and so interesting for the observer is relate the bird to its habitat. Climate, soil, vegetation, and revalent forms of life, all together determine whether an rea is suitable for a particular species. I cannot understand hy the magpie robin does not reside and nest in our arden though it has occasionally come on a tour of inspection. have little hope of finding an answer, but the attempt is lways interesting.

State Birds

An article in the Birdwatchers' Digest of July/August 1988 on Birds of State makes me wonder whether we should attempt to have State Birds in India. When the question of selecting a National Bird came up, one suggestion was to nominate the Great Indian Bustard, so as to draw attention to its endangered status. The peacock won on sentimental grounds, and I remember Joseph George's query about whether the pea-hen could share the throne. If we are to select State Birds, it could be on several basis : A rare bird, a visible goodlooking bird, a good songster, a useful bird as a destroyer of insects or whatever. The American Robin. Hawaii did well to select the Nene Goose have chosen the same seven species, the most popular being the Cardinal, Mockingbird, Western Meadowlark and American Robin. Hawaii did well to select the nene Goose which was saved from extinction by the efforts of Sir Peter Scott; and Utah named the California Gull in gratitutde to a bird which destroyed a locust swarm many years ago.

Let us see if some of our readers can come up with criteria for selection, and suggestions, for our 22 States.

Reproductive Strategies in Waterfowl

In exchange for the Newsletter, I receive Ornis Fennica, the journal of the Finnish Ornithological Society. Vol. 65, No.2 of 1988, contains useful guidelines for a serious student of waterfowl. I quote from the article by Terhi Laurila, Department of Zoology, University of Helsinki, Finland. There are 149 waterfowl species worldwide, and it is remarkable that data on 142 of these were obtained. The mean clutch size varies from 2-14 eggs. David Lack proposed that clutch size is limited by the food resources available to the female around the time of laying. Also that large eggs were advantageous because they allowed the duckling to hatch at a more advanced stage. Larger species tend to have smaller clutches than smaller species. This is not always so. Our sunbirds and tailor birds have only 3-4 eggs while the patridge and jungle fowl could have a dozen.

What is interesting from our point of view is the list of independent variables which the author identified for his study. These were :

"Breeding range (the range, in latitudes, where breeding occurs regularly ; introduced populations were not taken into account).

1. Restricted (2-20)
2. Intermediate (21-40)
3. Wide (41-115)

Distance from the equator (the northernmost, or southernmost — for southern hemisphere species, limit of the breeding range, in latitudes).

1. Tropical (0-30)
2. Temperate (31-60)
3. Arctic (61-90)

Mating system

1. Monogamous, permanent pair-bond.
2. Monogamous, seasonal pair-bond.
3. Polygamous

ding type

1. Feeding mainly by grazing
2. Feeding mainly by dabbling
3. Feeding mainly by diving
4. Feeding mainly by diving and grazing.

Age at maturity

1. Mature in the first year of life
2. Mature in the second year of life
3. Mature in the third or in a later year of life

Nest concealment

1. Nest on the ground, usually not concealed from above.
2. Nest on the ground, usually concealed from above.
3. Nest in a hole or cavity.

Paternal care

1. No male guarding
2. Male leaves female after laying
3. Male stays for some time after laying
4. Male helps in brooding
5. Male defends a territory and helps in brooding
6. Male defends a territory, incubates and helps in brooding.

Independence of the young

1. Young independent after fledging
2. Young independent at fledging
3. Young independent before fledging
4. Young independent soon after hatching

As the whole material comprised only one family, I us species as the taxonomic unit for comparisons."

Redbacked Shrike

M.K. Himmatsinhji in his articles refers to the earl presence and then the disappearance of the redback shrike from his grounds in Kutch.

It is well known, of course, that even a slight change habitat conditions makes it incumbent on some species leave the area. I remember the existence for many years a small group of whitebrowed bulbuls in a wooded pat near our house in the suburbs of Bombay. The birds, as as I recall, never came to our garden, but continued survive in (to my eyes) much less hospitable surroundin than our grounds. It was only when the wooded area w hacked down by builders that the birds departed from t locality for good.

I have written earlier that with the growth of trees in o Bangalore garden we have lost the pied bush chat and t blackbellied finch lark, both species which abound in t neighbourhood. Birds are certainly choosy about their livi rooms. There is the famous case of the sedge warbler in t United States, which favours only areas where juniper tre are regularly burnt down. It would be interesting to he from readers about species with which they are very famil being attached to particular forms of vegetation.

BIRD LIFE OF INDIA : IN HOMAGE TO SALIM ALI

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The Indian subcontinent, and here we will follow Salim Ali-Ripley Handbook in considering Pakistan, India and Bangladesh together, has 1200 of the 1500 species of the Oriental region. How are these distributed over the subcontinent ? We may again think of this diversity being a result of barriers to dispersal, of a range of habitats being occupied by different species, and of any one habitat type being packed through differentiation of ecological niches.

6. Geographical Distributions

One may then begin the enquiry with geographical ranges of the bird species. Are most species confined to small portions of the total subcontinent, or do they all overlap throughout the subcontinent ? As in other regions, we expect the sizes of geographical ranges to follow lognormal distribution, with many medium sized and a relatively few very large ranges. At the two extremes stand the Narcondar Hornbill, confined to a single island of 4 km^2 in the Nicobar and the Little Green Heron with a distribution coverin much of the globe. The Laughing Thrushes, a group o highly sedentary forest dwelling birds of hills exemplif ranges of birds characteristic of habitat islands. The barrier to dispersal between the different suitable habitats of thi genus have evidently lead to a high degree of speciation In direct contrast is the Jungle Crow *Corvus macrorhyncho* a species with the widest tolerance of habitat conditions. It is to be seen everywhere from the sea coast to the top o Nilgiris, in the forests, scrub and the heart of cities, and its distribution encompasses most of the subcontinent. Ye another distribution pattern is exemplified by the pair Velvetfronted Nuthatch and the Great Indian Bustard. The two have quite widespread, but complimentary distribution the former confined to treelands and the latter to grassland

different kind of complimentarity of ranges is exhibited by e two species of Junglefowl, the Red and the Grey, *Gallus llus murghi* and *Gallus sonneratii*. There are other such ecies pairs of ecological equivalents too, often one to the rth and east of Godavari and the other to the south and st. Other notable distribution patterns are discontinuous, e extreme form being that of the Fairy Bluebird occuring the rainforests of the Western Ghats, and Northeastern dia. The Black and Orange Flycatcher, an endemic of estern Ghats has a highly discontinuous, patchy distribun within its range.

How would the geographical range size of a species ate to the likelihood of its going extinct ? A species like e Narcondam Hornbill or the Nilgiri Laughing Thrush h a very restricted distribution is obviously more susceptible, their total populations are quite limited; a mere 400 in e case of the Narcondam Hornbill. Furthermore if the pulation undergoes a crash, with a local outbreak of ease or a flood or a cyclone, there is little possibility of its plenishment. Mountain quail, one of the species to have ne extinct from India had such a highly restricted geograical range in the Kumaon hills of Western Himalayas.

Species – Area Relationships

The geographical ranges of different species obviously erlap to a great extent, so that the bird community of any en region has a large number of species. A significant ological question is to understand how many, and the tors governing this number. An excellent point of departure r examining this question is the regional bird surveys that re such a valuable contribution of Dr. Salim Ali. Beginng fifty years ago with his surveys of the birds of Bombay d Salsette islands, he meticulously collected and documented the bird faunas of 12 different regions. To these we ve added a few other surveys including two of our own w available. At the lowest spatial scale we have our own ta from surveys of 10 ha plot at Bhairumbe which harbours total of 106 species; at the medium spatial scale are veral regional surveys; and the subcontinent as a whole h an area of 4×10^8 ha harbours 1200 species. The data s been plotted on a log-log scale, and the line of best fit ggests that the relationship is of the following form :

$$S = 98\, A.^{0.12}$$

ere S is the number of species and A is the area of the ality in hectares. While it would be improper to extrapolate the relation to very small areas, it does suggest that all, homogeneous habitats of about 10 ha in size may bour around 75 species, with the species number increasing h area with a power of 0.12; i.e., the species number ubles when the area increases by a factor of about 340 es. The first number of 75 is the packing of species hin a homogeneous habitat due to niche differentiation; latter, the increase as area increases is due to other ds of habitats being included in the survey, with these w habitats bringing in an additional species component.

8. Habitat Preferences

Any region may be thought of as a mosaic of different kinds of habitats. These may be markedly different from each other as when a swamp is surrounded by forest, or may gradually grade one into the other, as when the forest becomes progressively stunted towards a wind exposed ridge. Different species differ from each other in their sensitivity to environmental grain, the more fine grained species discriminate habitats in greater detail and may be specialized to a narrower range of habitats. We have looked at the 580 species of the Western Ghats province in terms of their utilization of the 24 different habitats of the province. A species may use between 1 to 23 different habitat types, with a mode at 2. The frequency distribution of habitat use is highly skewed positively, conforming to the lognormal. Such a distribution implies that the variable, the number of habitats utilized by a species in this case is governed by a large number of factors, acting in a multiplicative fashion. Such a distribution is encountered in many phenomena of interest to us; for instance in the size frequency distribution of geographical ranges as well as in the relative abundance of bird species in a community of birds. When such a distribution obtains extreme large values are far commoner than would be the case with a normal distribution. Thus in this case the mean number of habitats used by a species is 3.21 and the standard deviation 2.12; nevertheless there are species using as many as 23 different habitat types. The most versatile of all species is of course our Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*). It occurs everywhere from the sea coast to the highest peaks in the Nilgiris and Annamalais, in the high rainfall tracts of Kerala to the desert of Western Rajasthan, in open forest far away from habitation to the heart of Bombay and Calcutta.

These 24 habitats may be ranked in terms of the proportion of total species utilizing them. It turns out that the three habitats used by the largest number of species are the dry tracts under cultivation, and suburban habitation. More natural habitats such as freshwater marshes, semi-evergreen forests, rocky hillocks with scrub and evergreen forest then follow. This is contrary to the usual wisdom that the evergreen forest is the biologically most diverse of the habitats. In fact, out studies of flowering plant and insect diversity on the Western Ghats also corroborate this finding; the evergreen forests are not necessarily the most diverse; moderate levels of human disturbance tending to enhance species diversity. This enhancement of species diversity through human disturbance seems to relate to the fact that such disturbance tends to render the habitat more heterogeneous with a patchwork of grass and scrub and tree growth that can pack in larger number of species.

Of the 580 species, 40 are habitat specialists in that they use only one of the habitats, while 14 are highly generalized in that they use 9 or more habitat types. As expected, the generalists (Peafowl, White breasted Kingfisher) use the 24 habitats much more evenly. Thus between 5 and 6 habitats account for almost 50% of total habitat use by all the

species; with generalists it takes between 9 and 10 habitats to account for a similar fraction. The habitat specialists on the other hand are concentrated in very much fewer habitats, the freshwater marshes accounting for 44% of them, rocky scrub 14% and the evergreen forest 12%.

The bird fauna of India may then be thought of as comprising of four major components. The majority are generalists inhabiting treelands of various types, and disturbed by man to different degrees. These also contribute towards our familiar garden birds. The second component is the specialists of wetlands; the habitats. The most threate of these are undoubtedly the wetland and dry scrub/gr land specialists for these are the habitats being the r rapidly eliminated from our sub-continent. Hence extinction of Pinkheaded Duck and the near – extinc of Jerdon's Courser. It is also the reason why the Whitewi Wood – Duck, the Great Indian bustard and the Be Florican have suffered such drastic reductions in t population.

(To be continu

OBSERVATION ON THE NESTING OF GREEN BARBET IN A DELHI GARDEN

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In this article I report my observations on the nesting of Green Barbet (*Megalaima zeylanica*) in a Delhi garden, made during the period of 1986-87. These observations were made over prolonged tea sessions in the sunlit gardens of Gwyer Hall. Gwyer Hall is one of Delhi University's halls of residence and is rather unique in its archaic architecture – with its rows of pantheon pillars, high ceilings and sprawling lawns – all reminiscent of a bygone era.

During Nov. - Dec., 1986 I began hearing the characteristic territorial calls of green barbets. Ali and Ripley's Handbook describes these calls as : a harsh 'kr-r-r-r, kr-r-r-r, ... kutroo, kutroo, kutroo.....' and 'kutruk, kutruk, kutruk...'. Quite by chance a pair of green barbets decided to build their nest in a neem tree in Gwyer Hall gardens, quite close to where we would sit. The nest site faces south east and its height is above 15m from ground level. Our observations thenceforth were mostly about this pair and are summarized below.

1. Green barbets start their characteristic territorial calls and nest excavation in Nov/Dec (in Delhi) but they actually commence breeding in March. Thus, for roughly 3-4 months before they breed, barbets are busy chipping in the tree trunks for excavating their nest.
2. Nest excavation is completed in stages. Our observations are: a shallow cup is first dug; this is deepened and later the diameter is enlarged by chipping at the rim. The whole process is repeated several times during nest excavation.
3. Since there is no sexual dimorphism in green barbets it is difficult to say to what extent the different sexes were sharing the task of nest chipping. However, individuals of the pair under observation were seen to take over, one from the other, during the chipping operation. Therefore it can be assumed that both sexes share nest building chores and that pair formation occurs early. (Our guess about pair formation is a solitary male first starts preliminary chipping at a chosen site. He is later joined by a female and together they complete excavation of the nest.)
4. An interesting observation concerns the conspicu naked orange coloured skin patch around the ey green barbets. We observed that the skin patch w change its colour from dark orange to yellow, aft bird ended its chipping session. Ali and Ripley do mention any change of colour of the bare patch b feel that what we observed could have a relationsh chipping activity. The colour change could possibl indicative of the level of blood flow in the head reg following intense physical activity.
5. During the period in which the green barbets v excavating their nest and also afterwards, they v often troubled by rose ringed parakeets and comm mynas. The trouble caused was mainly with the in of driving the barbets away and taking possession o nest cavity.
6. In Jan., 1987 we chanced to see a Crimsonbrea Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) excavating a in another part of the Delhi University campus. Ob vations on this are interesting from a comparative point : the nest site was considerably lower (a 10m); a nest was being excavated on a Ficus (which is presumably much softer than a neem branch) and most importantly, the chipping had sta in January. This means that between Jan. to Ma this smaller cousin of the green barbet could comp its nest excavation in a much smaller time period.

Nest Excavation Period :

It is well known that in birds actual breeding (i.e. court copulation, egg laying etc.) can start only at a partic period of the year when food and other resources abundant in the local environment. For most frugivo birds in North India this period is in spring, sometim March (nearby the Holi festival). Barbets are primary nesters (they themselves excavate their nests – altho the occurrence of opportunistic nesters which do not exca in any population, is not ruled out) in contrast to secon hole nesters like myna, sparrow, roller etc. On these acc

timing and duration of nest excavation has considerable significance in the overall reproductive strategy of barbets. Considering that drilling in a hard tree trunk is energetically a costly affair and bound to consume considerable time, it is not surprizing therefore that barbets have obviously evolved a strategy for maximizing reproductive success. This strategy consists of starting excavation activities well before (roughly 3-4 months in green barbet and 2-3 months in crimson-breasted barbet) the actual breeding time comes. In contrast to barbets, apparently easy to build nests (from an energetic view point) consume lesser amount of time. For instance, sparrow's quickly build a nest, in a matter of few days only, and start breeding.

Nest Site Competition :

Panicker[*] has done a study to determine whether inter and intraspecific competition for nest holes is a major factor affecting breeding success of hole nesting birds. Our obse tions merely confirm that nest site competition is q intense, as several times the green barbets were on verge of being driven away from the cavity which they h excavated. Panicker emphasizes that a cavity in a tre shared by different species of birds simply by a variatio the period of breeding. This connotes resource partition among birds and i feel a study of barbets could be a r model. At the same time several questions on barbet Delhi would be worth looking into. Green barbets are q common in Delhi and it would be interesting to see w tree species they prefer for their nesting and what fact have been responsible for their success. Also, is a cert nest height a characteristic of different species of the ge Megalaima. Finally, an experimental verification of the r of nest site competition could make a good academic stu

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HARRIERS AT TAL CHHAPAR BLACKBUCK SANCTUARY, RAJASTHAN

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After four years of severe drought in Rajasthan, the monsoon was normal in 1988. The whole desert turned green. Growth of grasses was especially good in the protected areas and sanctuaries. To study the effect of drought on the wildlife, naturalists from Jaipur (A.K.S.., Harkirat Singh, Rajpal Singh and Asif) visited Tal Chhapar Blackbuck Sanctuary in Rajasthan. We were fortunate enough to be on time to witness passage migration of Harriers. The grass was about one to one and a half feet tall and on the bare patches in the grass harriers were sitting, spread out evenly in the entire sanctuary.

The Forest guard estimated that in the summer of 1987, only about a thousand Blackbucks survived, out of a total two thousand. Now it appears that wildlife at this sanctuary is recovering fast. But still there is scarcity of water. Only a small canal and a slight depression had water in it. Water in the sanctuary used to come through a nullah from Gopalpura hills. Now these water channels have been blocked by the salt works at the boundary of the sanctuary. Consequently, Blackbucks and other wildlife are dying during summer months.

We drove, into the sanctuary at 16.30 hours on the evening of September 3rd. On both sides of the road were small trees and on these trees *shorttoed* eagles were sitting. In all we saw at least 6 or 7 birds. We moved around in the grass silently. Blackbellied finch-larks, skylarks and crested larks flew off at our approach. Wherever, there was a bare patch in the grass, harriers were sitting. Harriers appeared to take advantage of the blackbuck flushing out grasshoppers and other insects. We saw mostly immature and female harriers. We also saw one Montagu's harrier in black phase. Only Marsh harriers were easily recognisable. We did see any male harriers on the evening of 3rd Septemb

According to the Handbook 'Female Montagu's & Fem Pale Harriers are indistinguishable in the field and fema of both these species only doubtfully distinguishable fr female Hen harrier by smaller less prominent white ru patch.' Also immatures of Hen harrier, pale harrier a Montagu's harrier are inseparable from female of the species in the field.

While returning back, we visited a small shallow po which was almost dry. A lone spotbill was sitting at t margin of the water. Small green bee-eaters, blue cheek bee-eaters and blue tailed bee-eaters were gathering roost for the night.

A party of blackbucks along with a few fawns were grazi and near these about 125 cattle egrets in breeding pluma were busy feeding. Only a single little egret was among th flock. Beside the cattle egrets about a hundred comm myna, mostly immature birds were also feeding. It w getting dark and visibility became poor. Two big dark eagl were sitting on a large Babul tree (*Acacia arabica*). Becau of poor light, we were not able to identify these birds.

The next morning we started off at 07.00 hours (4 September). Near a water filled canal, we noticed a pair spotbills, a green sandpiper and a greenshank. Harkir noticed a small waterhen like bird with under tail cove white but it disappeared before we could identify it. Gr partridges were calling all the time and sometimes the sc call of a common sandgrouse was also heard. In the distan Blackbucks were feeding. An immature Marsh harrier fle past us. Two black ibises were also busy feeding.

We entered the grass leaving the road and were surprised to see a number of male Montagu's and a few male Hen harriers. We did see some female harriers but not in the same number as on 3rd evening. Apparently they had migrated from here and what we were noticing was passage migration of harriers.

One Kestrel was hovering in the distance. It dived a few times in the grass presumably with success, because, it took some time to come out of the grass, every time it dived.

We moved towards the boundary of the sanctuary and here a mud wall separates the sanctuary from the private land. On this side, about 400 acres of land was given away by the forest department to the salt works. A sad story for the sanctuary and blackbucks.

On this mud wall Kestrels and some immature harriers were sitting. We turned around and as we were moving towards the road a fox ran through the grass to hide in a thicket.

After moving a little more, we noticed a whitish buff eagle sitting in the grass, feeding, when it finished feeding, in flew off to a small tree where another similar eagle was sitting. It had white rump, dark tail and a dark trailing edge to the wings.

As it was getting hot and humid, we returned back to the rest house. After a short rest we went out to a small pond near the Chhaper village. In the pond we saw four spotbills and some little grebes. Black Ibises were feeding near the pond.

Tal Chhapar, a unique ecosystem is now facing many problems, scarcity of water, spreading *Prosopis juliflora*, encroachment and disturbance by the saltworks, menace of Pariah dogs and lack of funds.

SPARROWS' BLACK STATUS SYMBOL

CHRIS BARNARD

Status symbols are a pretty mixed bag. Anything from Porsches and Poussins to VW insignias and strings of beads can be pressed into service in the name of oneupmanship. Some symbols reflect wealth or measures of physical prowess, others are simply arbitrary whims of fashion. Other animals adopt status symbols too, but there's nothing whimsical about these. Status symbols designed by natural selection always mean business. The familiar house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) is a case in point.

House sparrows are one of a number of small bird species which appear to use a "status badge" system to determine social dominance in competition. The badge in this case is confined to males and consists of the conspicuous black patch on the throat and breast. The bigger the patch, the tougher the male and the higher his social rank. Recent work by Anders Moller of the University of Uppsala has shown that the size of male sparrow's badge determines both his status among males and his attractiveness to females.

During winter, when food demand is high and days short, males with large badges have priority at feeding sites without the need for costly and injurious fights. Only when two birds have so similar badges that their status is difficult to tell apart does the argument become physical.

All this red carpet treatment pays dividends in the long run. Well-fed dominant males are able to acquire high quality breeding territories (those with sheltered nesting places) much earlier in the spring than their undernourished low-status companions. While some low-ranking males in Moller's study did manage to obtain territories, their responses to stuffed males with different sized badges suggested they would soon loose them to any large-badged challenger.

One problem with all this, however, is that the throat patch status badge is cheap to produce. The metabolic cost to the male of producing a bit more pigment (melanin) to bump up the size of his badge is negligible, so what is to stop weaklings masquerading as tough guys by sporting large badges ? The answer seems to be the sparrow equivalent to putting your money where your mouth is. Even the topmost birds are occasionally challenged to see whether their front is genuine. Low-status males who are artificially promoted by having their badges enlarged with dye are rumbled almost straight away. Once uncovered, cheats have a tough time and draw a much increased rate of attack from companions.

Since aggressive policing keeps the status badge system reliable, females can use the size of male's badge as a guide to his quality and the quality of her offspring should she choose to mate with him. Moller's study suggests that females have a strong preference for big-badged, macho males and even solicit mounts from stuffed dummies as long as they have large badges. Males with big badges paired with females earlier in the breeding season and were able to defend them from clandestine copulations by other males. By the same token, however, they themselves managed to sneak several extra-pair copulations with other females by outcompeting rivals in communal sexual displays.

Nevertheless, despite their philandering, big-badged males are still a good bet for females. Moller found that their high quality, sheltered nest sites resulted in fewer chicks falling to their deaths or being lost to predators and that they were more likely to care for their offspring by feeding them. Furthermore, males with big badges had bigger testis and were likely to transfer more sperm per copulation. All round, therefore, females mating with high-ranking males produced more surviving offspring who stood to inherit their father's passport to success.

— *The Guardian*

SOME BIRDS AROUND PUSHKAR LAKE

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Pushkar Lake is considered to be one of the holiest lakes for Hindus, and the second largest river of western Rajasthan, the Luni, emerges from here. The lake is situated at the easternmost end of the Aravalli range, and its water spread is 1.25 kms x 0.65 kms. The major flora consist of Lotus (*Nelumbium speciosum*), *Polygenum hydropiper, Potamogoton spp., Saccarus spontaneum and Cyperus spp.* Sugar cane is abundantly grown on the southern bank. Our observations were made in November 1986, when there was a heavy mela rush because of Megha Mela.

Labeo rohita and *L. calbasu* and *Channa matrulius* are semi-feral fish in the lake. There are plenty of these and of a large size because the pilgrims feed wheat flour paste and roasted gram to them.

The Little Grebe (*Podiceps ruficollis*) is quite comm and lives in the middle of the lake. At this time the populati consisted of about 11. Seven white eyeed pochards (*Ayth nyroca*) were also observed mainly near the banks whe there was less human activity, but they were not too wa either because no one molested them. Eight Little Corm rants (*Phalacrocorax niger*) were observed at the southe bank basking in mid water, perching on stones and on t water supply pipelines. Two pairs of Barheaded Gee (*Anser indicus*) were observed on the southern bank whe there was much aquatic vegetation. There were also Lit Egrets, Little Stints, Blackwinged Stills and Sandpipers whe the water was shallow. It was a pleasure to see so ma birds in close association with man. This shows that bir lose their fright of humans if they are not molested.

Comments on the Newsletter — V. Santharam, 68, Santhome High Road, Madras - 600 028.

I have the following comments on the July-August '88 issue of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers.

With reference to Mr. Theodore Baskaran's note on unusual congregations of spotbill ducks, I would like to mention that a similar congregation was reported by me in the Nov-Dec 1982 issue of the Newsletter. This observation was made in June 1982, at the Kalyani Dam (Chittoor Dist., A.P.), and about 250 birds were seen.

Mr. S.N. Varu has reported about Ringed Plover. Was it the Eastern Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)? It would be better if the Latin names for these records are also included to avoid confusion.

Regarding Mr. Himmatsinhji's suggestion of re-naming the Whitecheeked Bulbul as 'Yellow-vented Bulbul', I would like to point out that the whitebrowed bulbul has also a yellow vent and so it might lead to some confusion.

Suggestions for the Newsletter — Ms. Manuele, Hermitage, Auroville P.O., Post Restante-605 101, Morattandi.

It is always with pleasure that I receive and read the Newsletter for Birdwatchers, and I am glad to see that it is now properly printed.

I have one suggestion, though. Would it be possible to include in it something like a "Reader's Corner", where letters from readers, suggestions, questions, could be published, and if possible, have someone answer the readers' questions ? Or is it too much work for the present editorial team (if team is the right term, as I do not know if you do this Newsletter all alone). In case you find this suggestion interesting, I personally have two questions :—

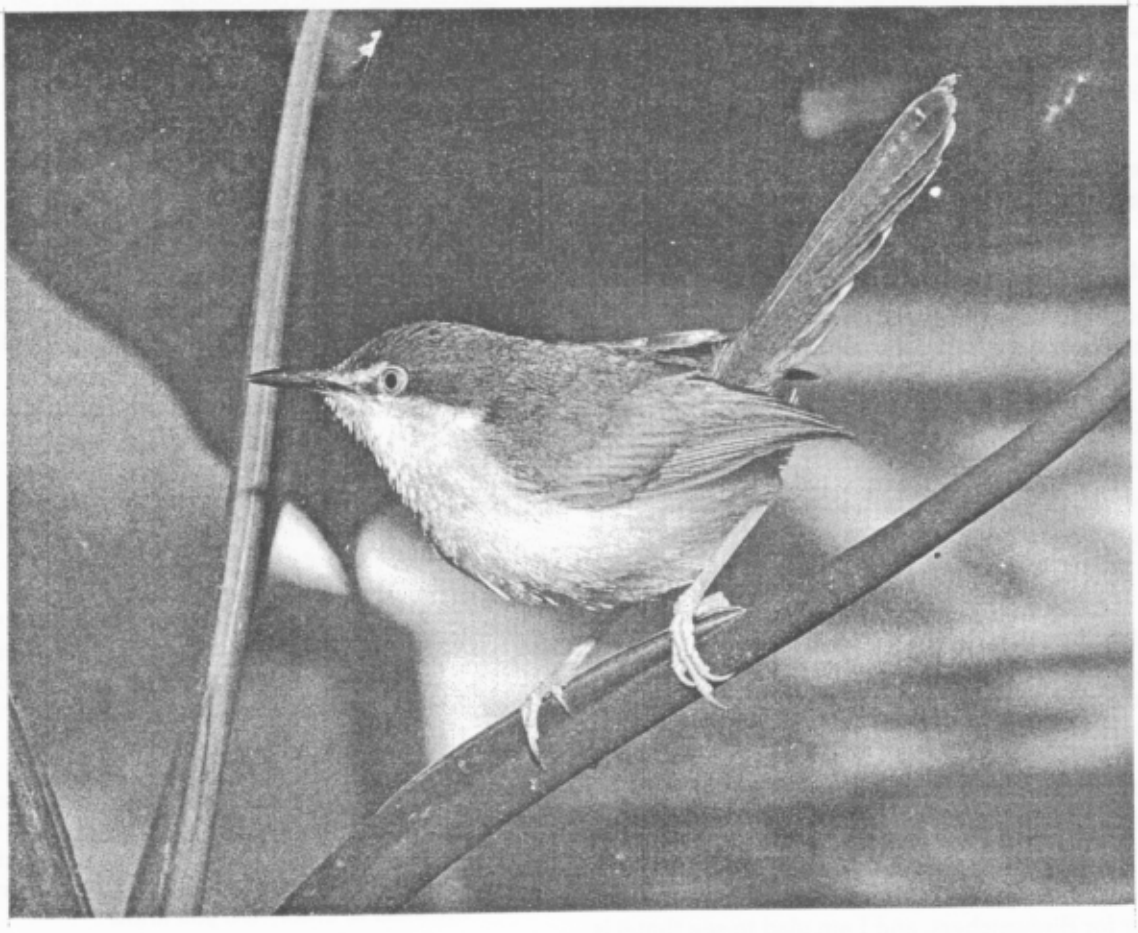
1. Regarding the Blue Jay (*Coracias benghalensis*), ho does one recognize the male from the female ? Whic one is the noisiest ? We constantly have them aroun here, and I see them quacking, making love, perchin for hours on a low bush, but as soon as they fly off, can't make out who's who. Are there any clues ? (Salim Ali says "sexes alike".)

2. I observed the courtship display of the Redwinge Bush Lark (*Mirafra erythroptera*) for a very long tim last winter, and the same question came to my mind When the male goes up and down, in V, si-si-si-si, w know its the male. But when they are both on th ground, it's not that easy to find out. One was crouchin in the grass, (a bit as a cat before catching a lullaby), an the other one was turning around, with the tail a bi upward, coming near, going further, coming nearer and so on. The other one in the grass was doing as if he (she ?) couldn't see anything, but when the other one was out of sight, he would turn slightly to see him (her ?) again. And I was wondering which of the two is the male, because we know that it's normally the male who makes much effort to please and attract the attention of the female, but the one turning around with its tai upward looked more like a female keeping ready for the male to enter. Do you know ?

Also, in the Newsletter, we find a lot of observations from people who tell what birds they see in their area. But could anyone publish an article, giving more details as to what information could be more particularly helpful to enrich our knowledge of birds ? Are there specific areas which are no yet know, on particular birds which we do not know much about ? And how to keep track (intelligently) of the birds we see, in a way that may be useful to others later on ? Could you publish a list of "rare birds" that may be worthwhile noting down if we see them ?

Small Indian Pratincoles Spotted in Swarm Proportions — K.S. Harshavardhana Bhat, C/o. 'Indian Naturalist', Udupi - 576 101.

Small Indian Pratincoles (*Glareola lactea*) were first spotted during the Asian Midwinter waterfowl census during January, 1987 at Gangolli Estury (c 13° 37' N, 74° 47' E), 45 Kms. north of Udupi. During November, 1988 they have again been spotted in almost swarm proportions (a flock of more than five hundred) at Betlikki wetlands, 20 Kms. south of the Gangolli Estury.



Ashy wren-warbler (*Prinia socialis*)

Photo S. Sridhar